

# Improving Federal Partnership Strategies

USGS Headquarters, Reston, VA

July 23, 2004

## ***Workshop Follow-up Report***

### ***Background and Goals of the Workshop***

The goals of the workshop were twofold: managers of federal programs that assist local and regional partners to reach conservation goals were brought together to (1) offer an introduction to the heritage area approach to community revitalization and to (2) initiate a conversation to better understand, coordinate and improve federal conservation assistance.

The workshop was originally proposed by Bess Gilellen, Director, American Heritage Rivers Initiative and Brenda Barrett, National Coordinator for Heritage Areas, National Park Service (NPS). The United States Geological Survey (USGS) hosted the workshop, which was organized by the Heritage Development Institute, an educational initiative of the Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA) and Suzanne Copping at the NPS National Heritage Areas office, and funded by a NPS Challenge Cost-Share Grant.

### ***Welcome and Introductions***

Carol Aten, USGS, Chief of Administrative Policy and Services welcomed attendees to the Reston headquarters and wished everyone a productive session. Carroll Van West, Director of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area and Coordinator of the Heritage Development Institute welcomed attendees, who in turn introduced themselves and their programs. The following twelve programs were represented:

- Council on Environmental Quality/ Interagency: *American Heritage Rivers Initiative*
- National Park Service: *National Heritage Areas, National Trails System, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance, and Conservation Study Institute*
- Federal Highway Administration: *National Scenic Byways Program*
- Department of Agriculture: *Resource Conservation and Development Program and Conservation Reserve Program*
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: *Coastal Zone Management Program, National Marine Sanctuaries, and National Estuarine Research Reserve System*
- Advisory Council for Historic Preservation/ Interagency: *Preserve America*

### ***Basics of Heritage Development***



In the morning, heritage area directors presented the basics about national heritage areas—what they are, who is involved and what are the goals and strategies. Augie Carlino, President and CEO, Rivers of Steel NHA, Dan Rice, President and CEO, Ohio and Erie National Heritage CanalWay, and Van West presented sessions on “The Benefits and Burdens of Heritage Areas,” “The Process and Politics of Partnerships,” “Telling the Story,” and “Resource Conservation through Partnerships.” After lunch, Brenda Barrett, NPS Coordinator of National Heritage Areas, discussed the role of the National Park Service in assisting national heritage area management entities achieve their goals.

## ***Conversations on Improving Federal Partnership Strategies***

Participants spent the afternoon discussing how they could better coordinate their programs' strategies to improve cooperation, information dissemination and exchange, and program effectiveness.

### ***Conversation I: Theory and Practice of Federal Partnerships***

The afternoon session was moderated by Jackie Tuxill on behalf of the NPS Conservation Study Institute. The Institute's mission is to create opportunities for dialogue, inquiry and lifelong learning to enhance the stewardship of parks, landscapes and communities. The discussion focused on the challenges facing federal agencies that provide services to local communities and state partners. Programs are under pressure to show measurable results and justify their work to their own agencies and the Administration. Some expressed the concern that partnering could send out the message that agencies are unnecessarily duplicating their conservation efforts.

Participants shared concepts that they consider integral to the theory and practice of partnerships. These include:

- Building local capacity
- Expectations (roles, responsibilities, outcomes)
- Measuring success
- Understanding non-governmental partners—honoring local heritage
- Encouraging “partnership culture”
- Selling benefits of the programs—how they interact and complement each other
- Determining effectiveness of programs--common baseline of “indicators”
- Meeting the statutory mandate and its objectives—adapted management program
- “Selling” the programs to Administrations in the future
- Training future leaders
- Competing priorities for resources
- Managing expectation at every level
- Delineating the Federal role and its limits
- Start-up money for local partners
- Finding sources for one-stop shopping (i.e., American Heritage Rivers Initiative Agriculture extension)
- Private Property Issues
- Maximizing technology
- Balancing flexibility with standards and guidelines
- Differing perceptions of partnership culture in Office of Management and Budget and elsewhere



## ***Conversation II: How Do We Improve Program Coordination to Better Serve our Constituents?***

Participants next discussed the tools and projects that programs have used or are using to improve program coordination.

Participants viewed a wall map, prepared by Steve Elkinton of the NPS National Trails System, which illustrated the number and concentration of overlapping Federal designations, especially in the east and intermountain regions. It was agreed that mapping is an excellent tool to better understand how the programs' interests overlap and to spread awareness to partners about the range of conservation tools and potential partnership opportunities.



Connie Ramirez, director of the NPS Federal Preservation Institute introduced the Historic Preservation Learning Portal, an advanced on-line information gathering tool that allows the user to query using concepts and questions about historic preservation-related information. The portal culls material from reliable sites, mostly government and educational sources.

Other examples of program coordination that were mentioned include:

- Lewis and Clark Bicentennial (a 3-year effort requiring 10 years of planning and the cooperation of 22 Federal agencies) [<http://www.lewisandclark200.org>]
- Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers [<http://www.coastalamerica.gov/text/learning.html>]
- USGS web-based National Atlas [<http://www.nationalatlas.gov>]
- Standard data-based map of trails on the web (can be used for constituent visits to the site/resource—used for the Ice Age Trail NST)

## ***Conversation III: Issues and Challenges***

Attendees then discussed the major issues and challenges facing programs today. Two major challenges surfaced: building local capacity, and measuring program outcomes.

The challenges facing building local capacity:

- Lack of a uniform definition of what it is...“sustainable local capacity to...”
- Challenge for program managers and higher ups
- Agencies want “communities” to graduate (a “goal”)
  - American Heritage Rivers after 5+ years
  - Some Rural Conservation and Development Districts have active for 40+ years now
- Articulating Federal interest in long-term involvement
- Explaining that planning builds capacity
  - Rural Conservation and Development Districts and Scenic Byways require a management plan
  - Updates necessary--Conservation Reserve Districts require them
- Communities need the capacity to plan and carry out plans and updates

The challenges facing measuring “success:”

- Success=accountability
- Government measurement tools don’t recognize partnerships--examples include Program Assessment Results Tool (PART)/ Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) that look for quantitative, not qualitative, data
- Measuring capacity over the long term
- Measuring outcomes
- Measuring Federal-state activities
- Partnership work is harder to measure –  
did the agency play a key role?  
Possibility of double-counting
- How to measure value of validation and designation?
- Solution may lie in setting measures of success—then figuring out how to satisfy government requirements—i.e., satisfaction surveys, or counting multiple party partnerships



### *Next Steps*

The afternoon discussions generated many “next steps,” which included: broader information sharing and discussion, training, mapping and understanding the overlaps and “selling” the opportunities that overlapping programs provide in terms of maximizing Federal resources. In further detail, suggested steps for better future Federal program coordination include:

- Distributing notes from this meeting
- Encourage broader information sharing
- Involve people and programs who are not here in future discussions—United States Forest Service Coop Forestry, NPS Partnerships Office, and national non-profits, e.g. National Trust, River Network
- Build capacity opportunities—Heritage Development Institute and River Network  
[\[http://www.rivernetwork.org\]](http://www.rivernetwork.org)--find scholarship money to send people to workshops
- Other leadership development programs? e.g. Blackstone Valley Institute  
[\[http://www.nps.gov/blac/institute/\]](http://www.nps.gov/blac/institute/)
  - Scenic Byways Resource Center [\[http://www.byways.org\]](http://www.byways.org)
  - Solicit ideas from local groups regarding what they need—a listening session?
- Get map on web
  - Start small
  - GIS-based collection and coordination
  - Investigate putting/ combining with USGS Atlas [\[http://www.nationalatlas.gov\]](http://www.nationalatlas.gov) or USGS National Map [\[http://nationalmap.usgs.gov\]](http://nationalmap.usgs.gov)
- Investigate overlaps in programs (through maps, other)
- Send links to Connie Ramirez (NPS) for Federal Preservation Portal  
[\[http://www.historicpreservation.gov\]](http://www.historicpreservation.gov)
  - Provide guidance to people on how to query for heritage info
- “Hot topic” discussions/ propose conference sessions
  - Develop and circulate a “hot topic” paper to address issues
- Understand measuring success:
  - Measurable objectives

- Operating Principles
  - Long-term vision
- Address issues related to PART (Program Assessment Rating Tool)—ask programs that have been through it  
[\[http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/legislative/testimony/cjohnson/040506\\_cjohnson\\_attach.pdf\]](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/legislative/testimony/cjohnson/040506_cjohnson_attach.pdf)
- Improve ability to coordinate “messengers” on benefits of partnerships
- Provide focus for coordinating funding (grants) programs
  - Identify barriers to funding
- Distribute Celeste Bernardo’s list of partnership competencies (when input process completed)—distribute similar efforts in other agencies
- Look at Gateway Community program (capacity building examples)
- Distribute Heritage Development Institute newsletter
- More follow-up, i.e. meeting in Washington, DC

The workshop allowed participants the opportunity to meet one another, learn about one another’s programs and challenges, and share information. It also generated thinking about how the Federal programs can benefit from aligning their interests and communicating information beyond their program constituencies.